found their seats and my puzzlement as to why Gallagher should attract such an audience was giving way to actual fears about the nature of the coming performance.

Eventually, Gallagher and his three piece band took to the stage and in the first couple of numbers, "Messing With the Kid" and "Tattooed Lady", things became a lot clearer . . .

The keyboards player shook his head from side to side, his hair hiding his face; the bass player looked suitably out of it; and Gallagher attempted to pummel everyone into the ground with a display of loud virtuosity.

Yeah, it was a bit too much like the sort of thing we got all the time in the late 'sixties and which made some of us think Cream had a lot to answer for.

Gallagher went through some more typically heavy English blues, stopped for a couple of fairly tasteful acoustic numbers and then back into more blues and a dose of rock 'n' roll.

On the one hand there was obvious technical skill and artistry, and on the other, a depressing predictability and simple, single-mindedness of purpose.

The fact that rock 'n' rollers could play their instruments might have been a revelation a few years back, but not now that more mature musicians such as Clapton have moved on from proving their skill to using it for some form of self expression.

Rory Gallagher's long been known as the guitar hero as musician as opposed to superstar; but while it might be quite healthy that's he's eschewed the show-biz elements in rock, he could probably do with a little of the self-consciousness of the more theatrical rockers.

No-one's asking the guy for a concept album or anything, you understand. But if he could aim just a little higher than at present . . . **Pete Dalton**

Pretty Things/ Roundhouse

SO COME on, own up, who's been hiding this group from me?

I mean, I always had the Pretty Things tagged as a group that was one of the ones that the over 25's reminisce about in their bathchairs.

Now, the P.T.'s come along and play this really excellent concert.

Keith Christmas who opened up proceedings, was much better than I'd anticipated.

After a dull beginning, he loosened up considerably, stopped worrying about his tuning, and improved a lot.

By the end of the set, the band were getting into their stride, and laid down a really nice version of "Brighter Day," followed by an amazing Duane Eddy rocker as an encore.

As the changeover was taking place for the Pretties, it slowly became obvious that here was An Important Group.

There was this smell of organisation in the air. Groups of well dressed little men with short hair began clustering stage right, and when the lights shone on them, you could see it reflecting off the dollar signs in their eyes; even the roadies looked unusually intelligent.

It was all a touch depressing.

However, I needn't have worried, the group bounced on stage and into the first number with such vigour that the drummer smashed two sticks in 60 secs.

For a group that has been going as long as they have, there was an amazing air of enthusiasm, you could feel that they were enjoying themselves, which always helps.

They opened up with various numbers from the "Silk Torpedo" album with a couple of oldies thrown in here and there for good measure.

Things began to accelerate after about three-quarters of an hour, and it got very chunky indeed. Highlights were a blaster of a version of "Silk Torpedo," and an amazing finisher called "It Isn't Rock & Roll," which persuaded a few people to dance, pretty unusual for the Roundhouse.

The encore was "Rosalind," and an incredible version of "Route 66" in which the drummer took over lead vocals and gleefully proceeded to destroy all the equipment he could stumble into.

I think I'll go and see them again. **Nick James**

Elton John/ Hammersmith

CURSES UPON the Marylebone Road and all the traffic that prevented me catching the Elton John Christmas Special in its magnificent tinselled entirety.

Gigs as good as this one are rare enough, without spending the first twenty minutes stuck inside a mobile with the King's Cross blues again.

Thus it passed that at least one reporter is unable to pass judgment on the opening numbers of what was the first EJ gig these shores had witnessed in no small age, and one of but a handful that the man had put together to celebrate his return to Britain, the festive season, and the third division.

No reservations about the rest of the three hours which John played though — sheer brilliance from him and the band; there must be very few acts capable of brewing up the sort of atmosphere that washed round the Hammersmith Odeon by the end of the night. Even at Christmas.

Hell, you saw it for yourself on the Christmas Eve Colour Stereo spectacular on telly on Christmas Eve, didn't you?

You didn't? Shame.

Previously I had been more than a mite sceptical about the continuing esteem in which the Elt was held, Charlie Murray's superlatives notwithstanding, and was unwilling to grant anything more than lightweight status to the fellow and his ridiculous eyesight.

But, live at least, Elton John adds up to a lot more than a good voice and a bunch of trendy lyric sheets.

The guy has *charm*, he has *style*, he can sing and play with ferocity as well as delicacy, and goddammit, he can rock and roll.

He opened — or so I was reliably informed — with a clutch of solo numbers from the early albums; things like "Skyline Pigeon" and "I Need You To Turn To" that the usual Elton gig allows no time for.

E'en so, it was not long before the band appeared for "Country Comfort," "Highflying Bird" and a roaring frantic "Burn Down The Mission" which closed the first half.

Billows of dry-iced mist billowed forth as the curtain rose for "Funeral For A Friend" with the svelt Elt perched on his piano stool looking like he's just fallen off the top of the Christmas tree in his little tin soldier glitter outfit, which struck a strange contrast with the dark yawning eeriness that came from the PA system and the raucous tones of Elton as he sang "Love Lies Bleeding," with the band cooking behind him.

Then came the hits, one after another, so that you started wondering how many chart entries that guy must have to his name that you should know so many of his works without even trying.

"Candle In The Wind"; a short break for "Grimsby" off the "Caribou" album; then "Rocket Man" with more punch and directness than ever came across from the radio, and a superlative "Benny And The Jets," which is presumably Elt's idea of a soul number (it made the US R&B charts) and sung in his best mock Donnie Elbert falsetto.

The audience lapped it up. Out came a relaxed nicely paced "Daniel," a beautifully played "Grey Seal" (a number which certainly deserves wider recognition than some of the man's more effete pieces), and a wistful "Yellow Brick Road," likewise handled with loving precision and taste by the band.

Ah yes, the band; Dee Murray's loping bass lines, Davey Johnstone's restrained and always appropriate axe work; Nigel Olsson's subtly understated drumming; and finally a special word for percussionist Ray Cooper, who is the only man (other than Roger Chapman) who can make playing a tambourine look like a definitive musical statement. And who can also blow a pretty mean duck call.

The introduction of the Muscle Shoals Horns put the final seal of mastery on the proceedings, and even though they did manage to blow a few bum notes during the rest of the show, their contribution certainly helped lift "Lucy In The Sky" and a frighteningly energetic "Saw Her Standing There" into another class altogether.

After which we had "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me," "Honky Cat" and a "Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting" which went on forever and which would have had just about everyone jiving in the aisles if the bouncers (I mean, Security), chaps hadn't taken their job quite so seriously.

After which what could possibly follow in the encore but "Crocodile Rock," "Your Song" and "White Christmas" itself, complete with a few hundred balloons and a couple of hundredweight of polystyrene snow just for good measure.

Nice one Elt. You may never get promotion to the second but you sure know how to put on a neat show. The Pope should never have tried to follow an act like that. **Neil Spencer.**

Captured! Rare shot of svelte Elt at feeding time.

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